Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits

Trust Your Feelings, but Use Your Head:
Discernment and the Psychology of Decision Making

Michael J. O'Sullivan, S.J.

22/4 September 1990

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For your information . . .

"Who? Me?" "I'm not involved in spirituality." "You must have gotten me mixed up with someone else." Such at times are the kinds of first response that come when the Jesuit Conference invites someone to become a member of the Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality. And the first reply to that is quite simply that we are all involved in Jesuit spirituality, even if it is not an *ex professo* specialty such as the teaching of spiritual theology or the giving of retreats or personal spiritual direction. The second reply is that the Seminar and its publication, *Studies,* quite deliberately attempts to draw on the experience, the insights, and the reflections of as wide a spectrum of United States Jesuits as possible in discussing what it means to be a Jesuit today in this country and in our circumstances, and how we live our lives as Jesuits. So, "Yes, you! Will you accept the invitation to join the Seminar?"

One of the most pleasant of these columns to write every year is the one in which I can introduce as new members of the Seminar those men who have been able to accept that invitation and who will serve for the next three years. This time the new members are John Breslin, John Donahue, John Foley, and Gerard Stockhausen.

John B. Breslin heads the Georgetown University Press and teaches English literature at Georgetown. He is a member of the New York Province and has had extensive editorial experience with both religious and secular publishing. John R. Donahue, a member of the Maryland Province, this fall takes up a position at the University of Notre Dame as professor of New Testament Studies. For many years the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley was fortunate to have him as a teacher of the same subject. John B. Foley at present is at JSTB doing advanced studies in liturgical theology. He is a member of the Missouri Province, a well-known composer of music and one of the founding members of the St. Louis Jesuits, whose music is known and played all over the world. Gerard L. Stockhausen, a member of the Wisconsin Province, teaches economics at Creighton University in Omaha and is a member of the formation community at Campion House in the same city.

Two new books have been published over the summer by the Institute of Jesuit Sources. The first is *Our Jesuit Life,* a compilation consisting of the Formula of the Institute (the basic "rule" of the Society of Jesus), selections from the text (written by St. Ignatius) of the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus, and excerpts from the documents of the three most recent general congregations (the supreme Jesuit governing body). By now all of the United States Jesuits will have received a copy. But the book is also available to any others who may wish to purchase it. For details see the advertisement in this issue of *Studies.* The second book is entitled *The Formula of the Institute: Notes for a Commentary.* It deals at length with that basic "rule" of the Society, the text which arose out of the deliberations of Ignatius and his companions and which expresses the fundamental, original inspiration of the Jesuits. See again the advertisement in this issue of *Studies* for details on how to order it.

John W. Padberg, S.J.
Editor

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It can be more fatiguing than a day of stonecutting.

It can be more nervewracking than a day of heart
surgery.

It can bring success, happiness, life . . .
or failure, unhappiness, death.

In today's security-conscious society, it's a job fewer
people want to tackle.

It's not for the faint-hearted who are afraid to fail.

It's not for the reckless who can be dangerous.

It invites ridicule, criticism and unpopularity.

But without it the world stands still.

It is the lonely, ulcerous, precarious job of making
decisions.

—Anonymous

Trust Your Feelings, but Use Your Head

Discernment and the Psychology of Decision Making

INTRODUCTION

Another paper on discernment?! Whether within the boundaries of religious life or in the broader world of the Church, we seem continually to hear this word *discernment*. At times, discernment's overutilization transforms it into a "buzzword" which begins to lose meaning and relevance.

While those employing "religious talk" speak of discerning, most of the rest of the world talks about making decisions. Interestingly enough, a wealth of information exists on both discernment and decision making. Yet each of these two bodies of literature does not seem to know that the other exists. Or at least they are not acknowledging and communicating with one another.

Within the Western traditions of Christianity, much has been written on the topic of discernment. This work spans centuries and includes authors such as Cassian, Gregory, Bernard, Thomas à Kempis, Teresa, John of the Cross, Francis de Sales, and, of course, Ignatius of Loyola, whose rules for the discernment of spirits form the foundation for much of the contemporary discussion. In addition to a variety of recent books on the topic, contemporary serials in spirituality (including *Studies*) offer articles and special issues on discernment. Whereas these current writers frequently avail themselves of the classic literature, they consistently neglect any reference to the issues and findings stemming from the past thirty years of theory and empirical research in the psychology of decision making. It seems to me that this oversight is most unfortunate, because the two disciplines have much to offer each other.

Take, for instance, the roles of emotion and cognition in the process of making decisions ("elections"). Should one pay more ttention to what one feels or to what one thinks? While both the spiritual and the psychological literatures consider these two functions important, spirituality seems more interested in the affective (consolation and desolation), while psychology emphasizes the rational.

This essay serves as an initial attempt to introduce those familiar with the language and processes of discernment to the concepts, theories, and empirical findings from the psychological study of decision making. Certainly, those engaged in the scientific work of psychology could also profit from an introduction to the centuries of religious thinking on this topic. The following discussion, however, is weighted more toward introducing the religious reader to the findings of psychology, since I am assuming that more "discerners" than decision makers read *Studies*.

The paper first briefly reviews Ignatian perspectives on discernment and making choices. These are seen as emphasizing the affective. Next, it presents a psychological model of decision making which emphasizes the rational. The essay then discusses a number of current developments in psychological theory and research which both substantiate the vital importance of cognitive processes in decision making and offer a critical evaluation of how we might be using Ignatian concepts. The concluding section of the paper summarizes and ties together what has been presented.

IGNATIAN DISCERNMENT AND TIMES OF CHOICE: AN OVERVIEW

For the purposes of the present essay, there appears no need either to repeat Ignatius's rules or to offer a comprehensive commentary on and analysis of them. Other authors have written extensively and in depth on these rules (Barry 1989; Buckley 1973; Cusson 1988; Endean 1989; Fleming 1981; Futrell 1970 1972; Toner 1971 1982).[1] Rather, the focus here is on the interaction of thought and emotion in discernment and the consequent process of making a choice. What does Ignatius seem to say about this interaction and what does contemporary psychological theory and research say?

Does Ignatius Emphasize Affect More than Intellect in Discernment?

While I must first admit that I am no expert on the Ignatian rules of discernment, it does seem that in these rules Ignatius, or at least those who interpret his writings, relies more on the interior movements of the affect than on conscious rational processes. For Ignatius, God works through both thoughts and emotions to guide humans. Cognition can generate affectivity and emotions can generate thoughts (Lazarus 1984; Zajonc 1984). While deception can occur in either direction, Ignatius seems more concerned about thoughts misleading the emotions (Buckley 1973).

Ignatius's preference for relying on feeling more than on thinking manifests itself again in his Three Times when a Correct and Good Choice of a Way of Life May Be Made (Puhl 1951, *SpEx*, 175–88).[2] In the first time one clearly knows what choice God calls one to make (*SpEx*, 175). During the second time one's choice rests on the experience of consolations and desolations, and the discern-

[1] [EDITOR'S NOTE: The name given in these references indicates the author or principal author of the particular source listed on pp. 39–41; the year given is the date of publication of that work. This date followed by a comma and a number indicates the page in that work to which the reader is referred.]

[2] References to the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola* are taken from the translation of Louis J. Puhl, S.J. (1951). Henceforth in this essay references to this text and its standard paragraph numbering will appear as follows: (*SpEx*, 175–88). This reads: *The Spiritual Exercises*, paragraphs #175 through #188.

ment of spirits (*SpEx,* 176). In the third time one makes a choice either by weighing the pros and cons of the various options (*SpEx,* 178–83) or by considering what one would like to have chosen if one were facing death and the day of judgment (*SpEx,* 184–87).

In these three times Ignatius presents a "cognitive" approach to making a choice, which he suggests is to be used when a more "affective" approach has not succeeded (*SpEx,* 178). Even then, such a decision needs confirmation in affectivity to ensure its soundness (Buckley 1973). In addition, within the context of the Exercises, decisions ("elections") are relegated to the Second Week, during which affectivity becomes the criterion for discerning the spirits (Buckley 1973). Of course, for Ignatius the affectivity must first be "ordered" before being allowed to function in this way, as deception can easily plague this discernment of interior movements. Perhaps for this reason Ignatius considers using external criteria (for example, "the teaching of Sacred Scripture and the Church, the directive of just authority acting justly") as a more reliable procedure whenever making decisions (Toner 1982, 80).

When examining the text of the Exercises, one notes a preference for using external criteria in making decisions, as well as a discussion of two procedures for making a decision which are more cognitive than affective. Nevertheless, in sheer volume of text, these discussions pale in comparison with Ignatius's treatment of the discernment of spirits vis-à-vis the experience of consolation and desolation. Following suit, commentators and scholars of Ignatian spirituality have written far more about the affective components of discernment and decision than about other approaches.

Consolation and Desolation

Ignatius discusses consolation both as a feeling and as "every increase of faith, hope, and love" (*SpEx,* 316). In the same manner he describes desolation both as feelings which are the opposite of consolation and as whatever leads "to want of faith, want of hope, want of love" (*SpEx*, 317). In the present essay I will not be discussing consolation and desolation in terms of their relative increases or decreases in faith, hope, and love. Certainly, in Ignatian spirituality faith, hope, and love have important theological, spiritual, and personal implications. However, the weight of the Ignatian text as well as of contemporary writings and practice rests on the affective aspects of consolation and desolation. Therefore, I will focus on consolation and desolation as feelings.

The distinction between consolation and desolation provides the key to understanding affectivity and its role in discernment. Buckley (1973) and Toner (1982) maintain that by consolation Ignatius means a feeling or cluster of feelings of peace and/or other positive emotions which draw one toward God. Conversely, desolation involves feelings of depression, gloominess, confusion, and disquiet which move one away from God and toward "earthly things." These "spiritual" feelings can be distinguished from their "nonspiritual" counterparts by the experience of these emotions as revolving around God, who actively engages the individual.

Consolation and desolation both have three components; namely, (1) the feeling itself (to give an example, peace or confusion), (2) the source of that feeling (for instance, God or something else), and (3) the consequences of the feeling on one's life and decisions (such as movement toward God or away from God). Sorting out these elements, ideally with the assistance of a spiritual guide/director, enables one to discern spiritual from nonspiritual feelings, consolation with cause or without it, God's will from someone else's will, and so forth. Toner (1982) incorporates a time dimension to make a further distinction between what he calls "essential" and "contingent" spiritual consolations. The enduring or bedrock peace that the believer experiences as a result of a fundamental life choice to move toward God defines the **essential** end of the spiritual consolation continuum, whereas the waxing and waning of intense feelings for God constitute the **contingent** end of the spectrum. The Ignatian rules of discernment concern themselves with contingent spiritual consolations.

A PSYCHOLOGICAL MODEL FOR SOUND DECISION MAKING

While Ignatius apparently emphasizes the affective, psychological models of decision making focus on the rational. First, in the pages that follow, one of these models is presented. In a subsequent section theory and empirical research in contemporary psychology are reviewed. These current developments not only seem to justify the attention the model gives to cognitive processes but also contribute to a critical evaluation of how Ignatius views emotion and cognition.

When faced with important or vital decisions, people often experience what Janis (1983 1989; Janis and Mann 1977) calls "decisional conflict." This "refers to opposing tendencies within the individual to accept and at the same time to reject a given course of action" (Janis 1983, 145). Whenever the person focuses on the decision, signs of this conflict become apparent. These include feelings of uncertainty, vacillation, hesitation, and the negative emotions accompanying acute psychological distress, such as anxiety, guilt, shame, frustration, or anger.

A review of the psychological research suggests that for most people the decisions most likely to engender stress and decisional conflict center around choice of career, changes in social affiliation, and threats to one's physical well-being (Janis 1983 1989). Decisions about social affiliations would include the choice of a marital partner or filing for a divorce, entrance to or exit from a religious order, converting from one religion to another, and so forth. When confronted with life-threatening illnesses and faced with a variety of medical options, one makes decisions in response to these threats to one's physical well-being.

Not surprisingly, these types of decisions correspond precisely to the choices over which people in religious contexts discern, pray, and seek the will of God. In the psychological literature, Janis and his colleagues have formulated a "conflict theory" analysis of such stressful decisions and have proposed a model facilitating sound decision-making procedures (Janis 1983 1989; Janis and Mann 1977; Wheeler and Janis 1980). In the following pages an outline of this model will be presented.

Procedures Basic for Sound Decision Making

Seven problem-solving procedures basic for arriving at sound decisions have been derived from the pertinent psychological literature (Janis and Mann 1977). First, the decision maker carefully surveys a wide range of alternatives. Second, the discerner clarifies all the objectives to be accomplished by the decision and identifies the values involved. Third, the individual carefully considers each alternative in terms of the costs and risks of both its positive and negative consequences. Fourth, the person seriously seeks new information appropriate for evaluating each alternative. Fifth, the decision maker thoroughly considers this new information or expert opinion, even when they do not support the individual's initial preferences. Sixth, before making the final decision, the person conscientiously reexamines the pluses and minuses of each alternative, even those previously considered unacceptable. Seventh, one definitively plans how the decided-upon choice will implemented, and devises contingency plans to handle the various foreseen risks.

If any of these seven procedures are skipped or performed inadequately, then the decision-making process is considered defective. The more numerous are the criteria not met before the decision maker becomes committed to a choice, the more defective is the process and the more likely it is that the person will face unforeseen setbacks and experience "postdecisional regret"—a state in which the individual loses confidence in the decision, experiences considerable distress, and begins to waffle on what he should do. Janis characterizes the utilization of these seven criteria as engaging in "vigilant information processing." Such vigilance is essential for high-quality decision making, but is not a case of all or nothing. However, the higher the degree of vigilant information processing, the higher the quality of the decision.

Essential Steps for Making a Stable Decision

The following five steps have been extracted from psychological research investigating people who were actually engaged in decision making. These steps distinguished individuals who made decisions they subsequently implemented successfully from others who made the same kinds of decisions but then later regretted them and failed to implement them.

In the **first** step the person is confronted with a threat or opportunity which must be evaluated to determine if it warrants the effort of making a decision. If so, the individual moves to the **second** step by seeking out various alternatives. Here the objectives and values involved in the decision receive consideration. The research indicates that most people are inclined to stay with their current course of action if at all possible, and will seek alternatives only when it becomes evident that they must change.

The **third** step involves carefully weighing the advantages and disadvantages of each alternative. At this point vigilant decision makers exert substantial efforts to obtain from a wide variety of sources reliable information on the potential outcomes of each option. The utility-probability model discussed previously plays a role here: the vigilant individual evaluates possible outcomes in terms of both their utility and their likelihood to facilitate one's values and objectives. The conscientious person pays special attention to new evidence that may go against one's initial preference.

At the end of the third step, the decision maker usually has reached a tentative decision based on the accumulated information. Now the individual moves to the **fourth** step, devising plans both to implement the decision and to inform others of the choice. Surveying one's social network, the individual realizes that sooner or later everyone in the network will learn of the decision, whether or not it directly implicates him or her. Will some people disapprove? What about those who are most intimate? Especially if the decision is controversial, the person most likely will not move to implement the decision without first giving intimate family and friends some idea of the direction one has decided to take. Before doing this, the decision taker devises strategies to avoid disapproval from family, friends, and other important reference groups. The individual develops social tactics and contingency plans to counter opposition and ensure success. For example, one prepares strong arguments to give those who might object to the decision. Finally, before trying to implement the new course of action, the vigilant decision maker takes another look at the available information on the practical difficulties involved and asks how it may be possible to overcome them and how to compensate for losses likely to occur.

In the fifth step, the individual stays with the decision despite negative feedback. It seems that many decisions go through a "honeymoon" period in which one feels happy and peaceful with the decision and proceeds with its implementation. However, it often happens that sooner or later the individual encounters strong negative feedback or other obstacles that lead her to question the decision. Still, if the vigilant decision maker has carefully gone through all the preceding steps in arriving at the decision, he tends to be only temporarily bothered and remains committed to implementing the decision. The stability of the decision now depends on (*a*) the amount and intensity of the negative feedback encountered when implementing the choice, (*b*) the person's capacity to tolerate negative feedback, and (*c*) the vigilance of the decision maker in processing the information and conscientiously completing the work of the preceding steps.

Finally, it should be noted that vigilant decision making does not always proceed in such an orderly way. These steps are not invariable stages through which one passes. In fact, particularly when one engages in changing social affiliations, it seems that reverting to Step 2 from Steps 3 or 4 is especially likely (Janis 1983).

Common Problems for Decision Makers

The seven procedures and five steps of vigilant decision making presented above serve as prescriptive norms people would do well to follow in order to avoid making errors when faced with important decisions. Indeed, most people could profit from improvements in their information processing and cognitive appraisals of options. Yet, of course, this is not what most people do when actually making decisions.

When faced with the difficult tasks of making important decisions, people commonly go to one extreme or the other. They either excessively delay arriving at closure or prematurely reach closure. When delaying, people tend either to (*a*) vacillate, which prolongs the early steps of decision making, or (*b*) procrastinate in carrying out the essential tasks of search, appraisal, and choice. On the other end of the continuum, the high stress of vital decisions can lead people to commit themselves impulsively without engaging in the procedures and steps promoting sound choices. In either case, such individuals probably would benefit from some direction or counseling geared to guide them through the essential processes.

Limits of Rationality: Effects of Psychological Stress

When faced with difficult and complex decisions, the human mind realizes its limits for thoroughly considering all alternatives. Most of us do not start with all the knowledge we need to evaluate the potential outcomes of choosing various options, let alone to estimate their probabilities. Once that information starts coming in, we easily can be overwhelmed by it. We begin to resort to the various heuristics ("rules of thumb"), biases, and other debilitating influences to be discussed in the next section. Other sources of error include misinformation as well as reliance on misleading analogies. As we will see, emotions can interfere with our ability to think clearly.

Arising from these limitations as well as from other sources, stress affects the individual facing a decisional dilemma. Stress results from the worry and fear that can develop when considering the known social or material losses one faces as a result of certain choices, including the costs of failing to live up to prior commitments. Then there is the distress generated by conflicting values that might be involved in having to choose among various "goods" or "evils." People also can become concerned about making fools out of themselves with their choices, or losing their self-esteem if a decision works out poorly.

High levels of stress interfere with cognition, impairing one's attention and perception while fostering rigidity in one's thinking. As a result, the individual tends to perceive fewer alternatives, overlook important long-term consequences of these alternatives, engage in an inadequate search for relevant information, evaluate expected outcomes erroneously, and utilize faulty heuristics and oversimplified decision rules which fail to consider the full range of values implicated in the final choice. When the stress reaches very high levels, premature closure becomes very likely as the generation of alternatives and the appraisal of outcomes are truncated, if not completely bypassed.

At such times people show a proclivity to decide on the basis of what friends or relatives seem to want rather than adequately considering the principal outcomes likely to occur. They may also rely on popular proverbs or religious principles. A final common tendency involves drawing an analogy to a past decision without paying sufficient attention to the specific details of the present situation.

Five Basic Patterns of Coping

While the conflict-theory model assumes that the stress generated by decisional conflict plays a major role in a person's failure to achieve high-quality decision making, the model maintains that stress does **not** necessarily have detrimental or maladaptive effects. Stress can engender constructive "worrying" which motivates people to engage in sound decision making. How we cope with the stress becomes paramount.

The model suggests five basic patterns of coping with the stress of decisional conflict. Janis calls the first pattern *unconflicted adherence*: here the decision maker ignores available information about potential risks or losses and opts to continue whatever is the current course of action. A second pattern called *unconflicted change* sees the individual uncritically opting for whatever alternative has been most highly recommended or seems most salient. *Defensive avoidance* is the third pattern. It describes the person who avoids a stressful decision by procrastinating, having someone else decide, rationalizing the least objectionable alternative, and selectively "hearing" only that information which fits what one "wants to hear." In the fourth pattern, labeled *hypervigilance*, the decision maker approaches a state of panic by frantically searching for a way out of the decisional dilemma and impulsively choosing whichever solution offers immediate relief. This pattern short-circuits rational thinking. Finally, *vigilance* describes the pattern in which one engages in a thorough search for relevant information, processes these data without bias, and carefully evaluates alternatives before reaching a decision.

Conflict theory maintains that, when important decisions with serious consequences are at stake, vigilance stands out as the only coping pattern which will facilitate sound decision making. When the other four coping patterns predominate, one will not complete the various cognitive tasks required for high-quality decisions. If the person experiences undesirable consequences from the decision, he most likely will be inundated with postdecisional regret which may interfere with his ability to recover from the setbacks. The resulting anxiety, anger, and stress prime the decision maker for the onset of any number of psychosomatic illnesses.

Every person facing important decisions can exhibit any of the five coping patterns. In addition to the individual's own personal psychological makeup, the coping pattern operative at a given time seems to be a function of (*a*) one's awareness of the risks involved with each of the alternatives, (*b*) one's hope or lack thereof of finding a better alternative, and (*c*) one's belief that there is adequate time for searching and deliberating before a decision must be made. The same person can use different coping patterns at different times, depending upon which of these specific conditions may be present.

A Decision Counselor's Role

The conflict-theory model provides a framework for a counselor seeking to facilitate high-quality decision making. The model maintains that unless vigilance becomes the decision maker's dominant coping pattern, the necessary procedures and steps for sound decisions most likely will not be completed. Flowing from the model is a set of expectations essential for becoming and remaining vigilant: the belief (*a*) that the decision involves serious risks, (*b*) that a satisfactory solution can be found, and (*c*) that sufficient time exists to find that solution. The counselor can help develop these expectations and assist the person in adopting a vigilant pattern. The counselor then guides the individual through the essential procedures and steps.

If the decision maker has adopted a pattern of unconflicted adherence, a counselor might ask questions leading the individual to (*a*) consider the possible undesirable consequences of not changing and (*b*) seek objective information and input from experts about the costs and risks of staying with the present course of action.

When dealing with a pattern of unconflicted change, counselors again need to encourage people to engage in various search-and-appraisal processes. Priorities in this case include (*a*) obtaining objective information and expert opinion about the risks involved in the intended change and (*b*) thoroughly evaluating the unfavorable outcomes being overlooked, including possible negative outcomes from not living up to prior commitments.

When faced with serious dilemmas, people most often engage in a coping pattern of defensive avoidance. The counselor counters this pattern by trying to establish a more optimistic outlook. New perspectives and support may be generated by encouraging decision makers to discuss their dilemmas with respected individuals within their social support network and with appropriate experts recommended by the counselor. Finally, the counselor can reassure the person that the chances of finding a good solution to the decisional conflict are favorable.

Reassurance also functions as a key strategy to counter the hypervigilant coping pattern. The counselor helps to slow down the decision-making process by encouraging the person to negotiate extended deadlines. If extensions are not possible or are too costly, then the focus becomes helping the individual to think realistically about what can be accomplished, given the existing deadlines.

In short, all these strategies attempt to steer the individual away from defective coping patterns and toward vigilant decision making. Put another way, high-quality decision making results when you "use your head" as competently as possible.[3]

A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

One familiar with Ignatian spirituality might easily conclude that the decision-making model just presented would nicely supplement the Ignatian Third Time of Making a Choice (*SpEx,* 177), but would have very little to do with the First and Second Times of Making a Choice (*SpEx,* 175f). Both the psychological model and the Ignatian third time share an emphasis on the rational, whereas the first time seems to involve the direct intervention of God and the second time

[3] For those seeking a more detailed presentation of this model, several different books might be of interest. Janis and Mann (1977) present the core theoretical model and the substantial research behind it. For those who seek to guide themselves through an important decision using these principles, Wheeler and Janis (1980) wrote a book precisely for this purpose. Janis (1983) also published a text for decision counselors who seek to help others through the decision-making process. Finally, for those involved in group and/or corporate policymaking, Janis (1989) outlines procedures for high-quality decision making. For those interested in how groups arrive at disastrous decisions, see Janis's earlier work on "groupthink" (Janis 1982).

concerns itself with feelings of consolation and desolation. However, current theory and research in psychology suggest that cognitive processes play a vital role both in what we experience as the presence of God and what we feel emotionally. As a result, this psychological model of decision making might contribute substantially to all three Ignatian times of choice as well as to the Ignatian discernment process itself.

Trends in Contemporary Psychology

For many of us, the names of Sigmund Freud and B. F. Skinner readily come to mind when we think of psychology. Their schools of thought typify our perceptions of the field as being in an either/or situation: *either* one endorses depth psychology with its emphasis on the unconscious and the determination of personality early in life as a result of psychosexual issues with one's parents, *or* one adheres to behavioral psychology, which downplays free will and seems to portray us all as rats or pigeons (which are only "rats with wings") conditioned by rewards and punishments. Yet the overwhelming majority of contemporary American psychologists would identify themselves with neither extreme.

Psychology experienced a "behavioral revolution" emphasizing the empirical study of behavior in reaction to the earlier theories of the unconscious, archetypes, and developmental stages of Freud, Jung, Erikson, and others. In recent years psychology has undergone a "cognitive revolution" in which scientific study has focused on such cognitive processes as thinking, expecting, remembering, information processing, language, problem solving, creativity, and deciding (Pribram 1986). It would be hard to overestimate the impact of this cognitive revolution on the variety of specialized fields in psychology: clinical, social, developmental, personality, and so forth.

The psychological study of decision making has been heavily influenced by the theoretical and applied work of cognitive psychologists. Both theory and data consistently indicate that our thoughts and other mental processes strongly influence our overt actions. Instead of just reacting to the world, usually we humans actively seek information about it, process this input in complex ways, make choices about what to do or not to do, and then evaluate those choices and actions (Bandura 1986; Baron 1989). When faced head-on with a speeding cement truck, one processes information and makes choices instantaneously. When there is question of making choices about careers, the data to be processed are far more complex and numerous, and decisions become difficult and prolonged.

Cognitive psychologists have investigated the interacting roles of judgment, information processing, risk management, and affect in the decision-making process. Social and clinical psychologists have studied how decisions are influenced by our perceptions and the level of stress we are experiencing. This research has resulted in models which outline procedures facilitating "well made" decisions and those which promote "faulty" ones. In all these developments cognitive (mental) processes take center stage, while affect or emotions seem to receive attention only when they confound good decision making.

Given these trends in contemporary psychology, the question then becomes, What does all this have to say to those interested in Ignatian discernment? Perhaps the place to begin this discussion is with a look at those three components of consolation and desolation mentioned on page 11 above: the feeling itself, the source of the feeling, and the consequences of the feeling.

Interaction Between Thoughts and Emotions: "The Feeling Itself"

As we discussed previously, Ignatius seems to emphasize the role of affect in discernment, especially consolation and desolation. Ignatius and the scholars who have studied him seem to discuss these feelings as if they are independent of cognitions. Current psychological thinking, however, sees emotions and cognitions as closely linked.

While we may easily realize that we are happy or sad, precisely how this feeling of joy or sadness occurs remains unknown (Izard 1989). In an effort to reach such answers, the current scientific investigation of emotions becomes quite technical in its comprehensive view of the neural processes, bodily changes, and mental activity involved in the human experience of emotion. Such technicalities are beyond the scope of this paper. However, the present discussion necessitates at least a little background information.

Whereas people commonly use the terms *emotions* and *feelings* interchangeably, present psychological theory and research consider feelings as only one of four integral components of emotions: cognitive processes, subjective feelings, physiological arousal/responses, and behavioral reactions. Psychologists differ in the extent to which they emphasize cognitive processes in the arousal and expression of emotions, some psychologists arguing that there are no emotions without antecedent cognitions (Bandura 1986; Crooks and Stein 1988; Izard 1989; Kagan 1984; Lazarus 1984).

The dozen or more approaches to the study of emotions generally fall into one of two categories. First, some psychologists view our emotions as a function of how we perceive and interpret both what we subjectively experience and what happens in the world around us (Bandura 1986; Izard 1989). Second, other psychologists hypothesize that we may react emotionally as a result of bodily sensations before we ever inquire the reason why (Izard 1989). Both schools of thought explain emotions and cognitions as highly interactive and interdependent.

An example of the first approach would be the case of Jack, who teaches history in high school. He gives his first examination of the year and the class as a whole does poorly. How Jack thinks about this situation will determine his emotional reaction. If he has seen this every year and has learned that this early in the semester students just have not begun to study seriously, Jack will not get upset over the exam results. If this is Jack's first teaching experience and he wonders whether he gave too hard an exam or perhaps has not been teaching effectively, Jack will have a negative emotional reaction to the exam results. Does Jack think his students did poorly on the exam as a result of his poor performance as a teacher, or because they did not study adequately for the exam? How he explains their poor performance will directly affect his reaction.

Psychologists with this perspective maintain an interactional model: one's thoughts lead to specific emotions, with the emotions in turn influencing thought and behavior (Bandura 1986; Crooks and Stein 1988; Spear, Penrod, and Baker 1988). Returning to our example, Jack thinks the students did poorly on the exam because they have not been taking his class seriously and they are lazy. Jack becomes angry and his stomach begins to churn. As he becomes more aroused, he begins to reflect that the students only think about themselves and seek only the easy route to grades, that they never think about him as their teacher and his feelings and health. This upsets him even more. He begins feeling sorry for himself, has a couple of scotches, and begins to plot strategies of retaliation against the students.

An example of the second approach involves the case of Jill, who is sitting calmly in her seat on an airplane as the jet cruises along at 33,000 feet. Without warning the plane suddenly seems to lose altitude and then begins bouncing about wildly. Jill's stomach seems to have risen into her throat. Without thinking about anything, she instantaneously becomes very alarmed, experiences fear, and realizes that adrenalin now rushes through her body. It is as if her body "knew" that such sudden sensations indicated the presence of danger.

This second approach also uses an interactional model. While bodily sensations might have produced the initial emotions, cognitive processes influence what happens next. When Jill suddenly sensed the plane falling and bouncing, she experienced alarm and fear without much cognitive processing of the information. She sensed danger and felt fear before she asked why. A moment later she might begin assessing the situation, recall similar experiences she has had in her years of travel, and conclude that the plane just hit unexpected turbulence and that everything is under control. The pilot then announces over the public-address system that unexpected turbulence is the problem, he has obtained permission to change altitude to escape this turbulence, everything will be normal in a minute, all should remain seated with seat belt on, and so forth. Jill no longer experiences alarm and fear, but now returns to her prior state of calmness.

Whether cognitive processes necessarily precede emotional experience remains a controversial issue in psychology (Lazarus 1984; Zajonc 1984). Yet the weight of the empirical research and psychological theory suggests that a satisfactory model of how emotions are activated and sustained must be multimodal and interactional. The data just do not support models which allow us to consider emotions as independent of cognitions or vice versa. It would be safe to say that, regardless of their theoretical stance, psychologists investigating these issues widely agree that "emotion-feeling states and cognitive processes are frequently, if not typically, highly interactive" (Izard 1989, 52).

Cognition's Impact on Emotion

These psychological findings suggest that we need to be more nuanced in our discussions of Ignatius's methods of making an election and rules of discernment. In these methods and rules, Ignatius repeatedly acknowledges the "careful interplay" of thought and affectivity which are believed to confirm each other at the time of election (Buckley 1973, 36). Yet, when we identify the second time of election as the "affective" way and the third time as the "rational" way, the discussion easily can isolate emotion from thought and thereby fail to recognize how interdependent and interactive they are. The same can be said whenever we discuss affectivity as the criterion for the rules of discernment in the Second Week but not in the First Week (Buckley 1973).

The psychological research suggests to me that directors need to attend to how counselees' cognitive processes affect their feelings of consolation and desolation. So too when people engage in making an election/decision. Before we ever think about it, we might instantaneously feel fear at the first rumble of an earthquake: the sudden unexpected movement produced terror as soon as we perceived it and before we could interpret it. But when considering consolation and desolation and trying to identify their source and consequences, the focus shifts to highly complex and developed emotions which involve sophisticated cognitive processes. Neither in academic discussions nor in spiritual direction is it helpful to advise people to trust their feelings without acknowledging how much their feelings may be influenced by their thinking.

There is wisdom in the fact that, in both the rules of discernment and the times of choice, Ignatius spends considerable time discussing the use of conscious reflection, calling for its integration with sensibility and emotion before judging the soundness of choices/decisions (Buckley 1973). Rather than concentrating primarily on just the affectivity, the counselor would do well to pay ample attention to how people are thinking, processing information, and establishing mental procedures for their decisions. The psychological evidence consistently indicates that cognitive errors negatively affect our emotions, perceptions, and decisions (Bandura 1986; Beck 1976; Kahneman, Slovic, and Tversky 1982; Williams, Watts, MacLeod, and Mathews 1988).

For example, Jack forgets to buy onion dip and jumps to the conclusion that the entire party will be a disaster. He becomes so anxious that he cannot think straight or socialize with his guests. Jill did not receive a phone call she was expecting, thinks that the person who failed to call does not like her, overgeneralizes to "No one loves me," and concludes that she must be a bad person. She becomes depressed. Both Jack in his anxiety and Jill in her depression also exhibit dichotomous thinking in which everything is either black or white, good or bad.

For both Jack and Jill, their errors in thinking facilitated the onset of negative emotional states, distorted their perceptions of the world, and most likely would have interfered with good decision making. Directors need to be alert for such errors, for they may be distorting the entire process of discernment and election.

Emotion's Impact on Cognition

While it seems that Ignatius calls for us to trust our feelings and have our affectivity confirm our rational decisions (Buckley 1973), this again needs to be nuanced. Otherwise, it may appear that our emotions are more trustworthy than our thinking in the decision-making process. The psychological data do not support this confidence. In recent years psychologists have given more attention to the reciprocal impact of emotion on cognition. Their conclusions indicate that our emotions can often distort our judgments even in important, practical contexts (Baron 1989). Positive and negative affect exert a strong influence on memory, judgment, and decision (Isen 1987; Isen and Shalker 1982). These emotions have an impact upon not just the final decision but upon the process used to reach that decision. As discerners and directors, it seems to me, we need to give just as much attention to the possible negative influence of emotions as to their potentially positive impact.

General Attribution Theory and the Psychology of Religion: "The Source of the Feeling"

The second core component of consolation and desolation for Ignatius is the source of the feeling: Is it from God or not? Recent developments in theory and research in the psychology of religion seem applicable to the issue of identifying the source of this feeling. Once again the "cognitive revolution" is evident in contemporary psychologists' renewed interest in the study of religion.

Attribution Theory: One Psychological View of Religion

Attribution theory makes a fundamental assumption that humans attempt to make sense out of their world, seeking to explain experiences and events by attributing them to causes. Attribution theory has played a central role in social psychology for the past two decades. A great deal of solid research has identified what seems to motivate the attributional process: when people are most likely to use which kinds of attributions, when people tend to attribute things to themselves or to something or someone else, what differences exist among the attributions used to explain one's own behavior as opposed to explaining the behavior of others, what influence there is of educational level and culture on causal attributions, how specific causal attributions are associated with the interaction of specific situational and personal characteristics, and so forth.

Religion also seeks to make sense out of life's experiences. Religion provides people with a ready-made system of causal explanations. It is not surprising, then, that attribution theory serves as a framework for the science of psychology as it investigates religious explanations and behaviors (Spilka, Shaver, and Kirkpatrick 1985).

Perhaps an example will illustrate this theoretical approach. I can think of times when I have attended liturgies which have deeply moved me, whether they have been ordinations, weddings, funerals, Holy Week liturgies, vow ceremonies, or whatever. During those times I usually have been in crowded churches or chapels and have known only some of the people there. The event itself, the music, the words spoken, the actions performed—all have facilitated deep emotional (visceral) arousal and an experience of unity with the others present, many or most of whom I did not know. Upon leaving the church I have found myself milling around with others and speaking of just having experienced God's presence, the Spirit at work in our midst, the Risen Jesus alive in others, or something similar. I also find many other people saying the same things.

Similarly, I can think of times when I have attended sports events which have deeply moved me, whether they be playoff games, championships, or just "big" games. During those times I have been in a packed stadium or pavilion and have only known some of the people there. One particular event comes to mind involving a classic situation: a major-league pennant was on the line, it was the bottom of the ninth inning, and some player made a key hit and scored the winning run. The song "Celebration" by Kool and the Gang was played through the stadium's public-address system, people were dancing in the aisles, hugging one another, and celebrating. I felt deep emotional (visceral) arousal and had an experience of unity with the others present, most of whom I did not know. Upon leaving the stadium, I found myself milling around with others and speaking of the experience we had all just shared. We were not speaking in terms of having just experienced the presence of God. In fact, if anyone was described in supernatural terms, it was the player who had just hit the pennant-winning RBI.

These two types of experiences share a number of significant similarities: an important event; a large group of people brought together to witness and participate in something with one another; motivating music-words-actions, all of which facilitated an emotional experience, visceral arousal; felt unity with others present, even strangers; and an experience that there was something here bigger than oneself, certainly something that was not created by oneself. One type of experience I attributed to God, the other I did not.

When considering these experiences, we see that two very important differences are evident: the disposition or cognitive set (mind set) with which I entered the events, and the setting in which I had these experiences. In one instance I entered a church for a sacred ceremony with religious (God) expectations; in the other I entered an athletic stadium for a game with no religious expectations (even though I was a devout fan).

Set and Setting as Key Variables

Years of psychological research have identified precisely these two variables, set and setting, as key correlates with the types of attributions people are likely to generate. Recently a great deal of research in the psychology of religion has investigated how set and setting interact to facilitate religious attributions (as well as facilitate religious experiences themselves). The data indicate that the overwhelming majority of reported religious experiences occur within religious settings (Spilka, Hood, and Gorsuch 1985).

At times a very strong cognitive set predominates over the impact of the setting and event. Perhaps Jack is a committed nonbeliever and/or has no religious language or concepts in his personal history. He enters a moving religious ceremony and, for lack of either belief or vocabulary, attributes his experience solely to the "beautiful music." Perhaps Jill is so disposed to experience God everywhere that she goes to the championship game and in the ensuing celebration attributes the experience to "God alive in the joy of the crowd." Likewise, the powerful situational factors involved in certain settings can overcome predisposing cognitive sets. Even people with rather weak religious dispositions report having moving religious experiences in retreat houses during a Cursillo or similar structured exercises.

Mistakes in the Attribution Process

In clinical and social psychology, a substantial body of research has focused on the mistakes in the attribution process and other cognitive errors people make which are not helpful for their daily functioning (Williams et al. 1988). It seems to me that much of this information is useful in the discernment process, either for our own discernment or in the direction of another's process.

The very language of "discerning the spirits" indicates that people engaged in this process have a religious disposition, a cognitive set to experience things religiously and to make God-attributions. If this is done in the context of the Exercises, during some other form of retreat, or even in the presence or the office of a spiritual director, the determinants of the situation and setting also powerfully incline one to make religious attributions. Indeed, God-attributions might be most appropriate and correct. However, the potent combination of this set and this setting create a definite proneness incorrectly to attribute to God what is not God at all. When one is so predisposed to experience the movements of the Spirit, one is susceptible to attributing too much to the Spirit, and failing to recognize accurately emotions-thoughts-movements which stem from one's own personal agenda or that of a director—both of whom are quite earnest in the genuine desire to seek only God's will.

Of course, the Exercises of the First and Second Weeks help safeguard against such errors in the attribution process by freeing one from inordinate attachments and setting one's desires on following Christ as completely as possible. Nevertheless, given the interactions among cognition and emotion, set and setting, director and directee, we must ask several questions.

Whether one is the discerner or the director, what are one's expectations about God in this situation? Is God expected to create certain feelings and not others? Is God expected to have a specific choice in mind ("God wants me to do *X*") or a general orientation ("God wants me to be the best person I can be and it is up to me to decide if that means doing *X* or *Y* or whatever"). Of course, this might lead to a discussion of what is one's theology of God and of vocation, which might not be a bad discussion to have.

The Role of Expectations

Regardless of one's theology, the psychological literature consistently demonstrates that a person's expectations strongly influence her consequent attributions, emotions, choices, and behaviors (Bandura 1986). In the discernment process, the biasing effects of one's religious expectations may lead one incorrectly to attribute "the source of the feeling" to God or the Spirit. Is enough attention focused on this possibility?

An example: Jack is making the Exercises to discern whether he should be a priest. Because of his personal history and family background, he has always wanted to be a "helper." Perhaps too, his family raised him to be a priest—even though they were unaware or not conscious of doing this. For many years he has always been rewarded and supported for serving others, especially in a religious context. Whenever he thinks about being a priest, therefore, he has an emotional experience of happiness or contentment. This unique pattern of thoughts and emotions has been occurring in Jack for several years. He entered the novitiate because he wanted to be a priest. Jack is in the Second Week of the Exercises. To both himself and his director, Jack seems to have rid himself of inordinate attachments and is seeking only what Christ the King is calling him to do. As he thinks of the priesthood, he again experiences his pattern–contentment. Jack and his director now say that this is "consolation" and that God is its source.

In Jack's case is it really spiritual consolation that he is experiencing and is God really behind it? Or is it Jack's well-developed pattern arising from his unique personal history and family context? Or is it perhaps both, or neither? Certainly, "God works through nature" and God works through our personal histories and our family backgrounds. One's personal psychological patterns can be the locus of the Spirit at work; but they can also be misinterpreted as the work of the Spirit when in actuality they are not. Here the point for discernment is this: Even when everything seems to indicate the movement of the Spirit, one needs to focus attention on evidence that there may be something else going on here. Otherwise, our pro-religious biases and expectations may blind us.

Note here that Ignatius's rules for the discernment of spirits in and of themselves create expectations which sometimes might hinder rather than promote good decision making. Declaring that the "Good Spirit" and the "Evil Spirit" act one way during the First Week and another way during the Second Week can create a series of biasing expectations just as well as it can serve as a set of criteria for judging after the fact what has happened in one's experience.

So are we to throw out the rules which have borne much fruit over many centuries? Of course not! However, given the many recent developments in our knowledge from cognitive and social psychology, thinking critically about these rules might be quite beneficial.

Heuristics—or "Rules of Thumb"—and Biases in Judgment: "The Consequences of the Feeling on One's Life and Decisions"

The third component of consolation and desolation for Ignatius involves the consequences of the feeling on one's life and decisions: Is one's movement toward God or away from God? To translate this consideration into the framework of cognitive psychology, the emotions function as data to be used in making decisions which then are evaluated in terms of their outcomes. Social and cognitive psychology have rich theoretical and research traditions investigating both how data are processed in decision making and how decisions are evaluated.

For those not familiar with the psychological literature, the following few pages may be challenging and bordering on "information overload." I encourage you to stay with the material, because it serves as a foundation for the psychological model of sound decision making presented earlier. Two different types of rational models of decision making will be presented: compensatory and noncompensatory models. The discussion will include two different compensatory models and four separate noncompensatory models. These models and their accompanying features will be presented briefly. An effort will be made to link the material to the Exercises.

Rational Models of Decision Making

When someone is faced with choosing between various alternatives because there is no obvious choice, his task involves processing information about the options so as to choose one and reject the others. Psychologists have investigated several rational approaches to decision making, combining them into two general categories: compensatory and noncompensatory models (Crooks and Stein 1988).

Compensatory Models

Compensatory models portray humans as basing decisions on an evaluation of how desirable potential outcomes of various options compensate for their undesirable potential outcomes. Essentially these approaches suggest that people weigh all the pros and cons, somehow quantify them, and allow the numerical values of the data to indicate the preferred option. Ignatius's Two Ways of Making a Choice of a Way of Life in the Third Time (*SpEx,* 178–88) falls under this rubric of compensatory models.

The two most commonly used compensatory models are the additive model and the utility-probability model. The *additive model* weighs the potential positive and negative features of each option. When faced with choosing a career, the decision maker starts by listing features common to the various alternatives. These features reflect the values or aspects of any career which the individual considers: he reflects, for example, on how interesting this career is, its level of personal autonomy, income, vacation time, opportunity for personal growth, contribution to society, geographical location, stress, potential for personal satisfaction, and so forth. An arbitrary unit is assigned to a given feature reflecting the value of that feature for the decision maker; +10 indicates maximum positive value, for example, whereas -10 means maximum negative value. To illustrate, perhaps Jack considers taking over the family business, being a lawyer, and becoming a priest as his three career choices. In terms of how interesting the career is, he assigns the family business -3, lawyer +4, priest +9; when assigning values for potential income, Jack gives the family business +8, lawyer +7, and priest -8. After he has assigned comparative values to the features of each career, he sums these up. His "preferred" choice is the career with the highest total. While relatively easy to implement, the additive model generally is not as accurate as the utility-probability model.

The *utility-probability model* portrays the decision maker following many of the additive model's procedures, but weighing the specific features of each alternative on two different scales. First, the evaluator assigns a numerical value to the desirability or utility of each feature. Second, the individual estimates the probability that a given career will facilitate the achievement of that feature. In other words, using the example above, when considering the feature "level of personal autonomy," Jack first determines how desirable to him is personal autonomy, and then estimates the likelihood that each career will actually produce this potential outcome. Perhaps Jack considers personal autonomy very important and assigns it a value of +10 (utility). When he thinks of the family business, he estimates that there is only a twenty-five percent chance (probability) that he will have much personal autonomy in this career. In terms of a career in the family business, the value for personal autonomy is equal to utility multiplied by probability, or 10 x .25 = +2.5. As a lawyer, Jack estimates that the chances are seventy-five percent that he will have personal autonomy: 10 x .75 = +7.5, the value estimate for this career. Jack estimates that being a priest offers him a fifty percent chance of personal autonomy, which results in a value of 10 x .50 = +5 for priesthood on this feature. Once he had totaled the values generated for all features for each career, Jack would choose the career with the highest total (Crooks and Stein 1988). Of course, that holds only if Jack's decision is governed completely by rationality—which is a big IF.

As mentioned above, the two methods Ignatius suggests in the third time of making a choice seem consistent with the compensatory models presented. Either the additive or the utility-probability model could be applied to these Ignatian procedures. It seems to me that at least three benefits result from supplementing Ignatius's methods with these models. First, the necessity of assigning numerical values to each advantage and disadvantage objectifies the weighing process (*SpEx,* 181). Second, this numerical weighing also forces one to clarify one's values. Third, the necessity of estimating probabilities leads one to think realistically about the likelihood of certain outcomes occurring in one's future.

Noncompensatory Models

In the noncompensatory approaches to decision making, not all features of each option may be considered, nor do features compensate for one another. Of the noncompensatory models, the most commonly used include the maximax, minimax, conjunctive, and elimination-by-aspects strategies. These can be briefly highlighted using the example of deciding which one of five computers to buy.

The *maximax* strategy involves comparing the best features of each computer and choosing the one with the strongest best asset. The *minimax* strategy compares the weakest feature of each computer and chooses the machine whose weakest characteristic is still stronger than the greatest weaknesses of the other machines. The *conjunctive* strategy sets minimally acceptable values for features and then eliminates any computers not meeting these standards; to cite an example, the computer must not weigh more than ten pounds and must have at least a forty-megabyte hard disk. Finally, the *elimination-by-aspects* strategy is often helpful when we face complex decisions. We eliminate alternatives one at a time by deciding on certain criteria each option must meet. Starting with one minimum criterion, we use it to evaluate each alternative. If more than one alternative remains after doing this, we choose a second criterion to eliminate more alternatives. We continue this way until only one option remains. Let us apply this approach to the computer example. First of all, the computer must be a portable; let us say that eliminates two of the five possibilities. Secondly, the computer must have a hard disk; that removes a third machine, leaving only two choices. Finally, the computer must have battery-power capabilities; that leaves only one computer, which is the one we choose (Crooks and Stein 1988; Tversky 1972).

Given the interaction between cognition and emotion, it becomes evident that a substantial amount of cognitive processing of information occurs in both Ignatius's First and Second Times of Choice (*SpEx*, 175f). Because of the psychological factors involved in God-attributions, in the first time of choice it seems prudent to slow down and carefully examine the data upon which one has based the conclusion that it is "God who has so moved and attracted one's will" (*SpEx*, 175). The conjunctive and elimination-by-aspects strategies could prove helpful here in establishing minimal criteria for clarifying whether or not it really is God who is moving and attracting one's will.

In the second time of choice, one must first label one's various feelings as consolations or desolations. Then, while considering the different courses of action, the individual must evaluate whether the experience of consolation and the absence of desolation are paired consistently with one option. Such tasks require substantial amounts of cognitive processing and rational judgment. In short, this second time most likely involves as much, if not more, cognition and rationality as it does affectivity. Once again, the conjunctive and elimination-by-aspects strategies could prove helpful in recognizing the course of action identified by the experience of consolation and the absence of desolation.

Heuristics in the Face of Uncertainty

When he discussed the third time, Ignatius first of all wrote, "This is a time of tranquility, . . . that is, a time when the soul is not agitated by different spirits, and has free and peaceful use of its natural powers" (*SpEx*, 177). Of course, major decisions as well as day-to-day decisions frequently come when we are anything but tranquil. Whether during times of stress and pressure or even when we calmly try to consider our options, we humans tend to make common errors in our processing of essential information.

When facing uncertainty and needing to make judgments and decisions, we humans tend to resort to *heuristics* or "rules of thumb." These heuristics can be viewed as shortcuts, or simple guidelines based on past experience which allow us to cut through much information to make decisions quickly and efficiently. Sometimes reasonably good decisions result. Often, however, the overuse of these heuristic devices leads to errors in judgment. Our rules of thumb easily become intuitive, and we humans have a strong tendency to rely more on our intuition than on rational or statistical decision methods (Kahneman et al. 1982; Tverksy and Kahneman 1974; Williams et al. 1988).

The discussion here will be limited to three of the most commonly used heuristics: availability, representativeness, and anchoring (Tversky and Kahneman 1974). The *availability heuristic* refers to the tendency to estimate the likelihood of various events or objects on the basis of how readily one can bring examples of them to mind. We access information from our memories as a function of how salient and memorable are the exemplars within a category. Many people determine flying to be more dangerous than driving on a freeway because of extensive and memorable media coverage of airline disasters in which large numbers of people are killed or injured. When trying to decide what to serve high-school students at a picnic, the availability heuristic allows us to quickly remember and decide on hot dogs rather than exotic seafood as the customary fare at such an event. However, when considering what exemplars of a career choice are readily available in a novitiate setting, the availability heuristic might cloud the judgment of a novice deciding on a way of life. The novice sees and has ready access to a number of outstanding and dedicated members of that religious community, but very little exposure to equally outstanding and dedicated members of other professions.

When using the *representative heuristic,* people judge the likelihood of an event on the basis of how prototypical it is of a larger group of events. Jill is energetic, carefree, rather slim, loves parties and good music, frequents night clubs, and loves to engage in physical exercise, especially skiing. When faced with deciding whether Jill is a professional dancer or schoolteacher, most would opt for dancer because of the stereotypes people hold of dancers and schoolteachers. Yet the probabilities overwhelmingly favor Jill's being a schoolteacher, simply because there are far more schoolteachers than there are professional dancers. This heuristic becomes particularly misleading when we overlook "base rate" information, that is, the relative frequency of a specific event or object in the general world around us (Baron 1989; Kahneman et al. 1982; Williams et al. 1988).

Let us go back to the example of Jack in the Second Week of the Exercises, discerning whether he is being called to the priesthood. Further, let us add that Jack is making this retreat in a Jesuit novitiate in the United States of America and is discerning Jesuit priesthood. We need to ask questions about base rates: How many males in the USA have a vocation (with the needed talents and wherewithal) to the priesthood? of those, how many have a vocation to the religious life? how many of those have a vocation to religious life in the Society? Let us say that the base rate is one out of a thousand. As one might imagine, the probabilities are heavily weighted against Jack's having a vocation to the Society.

Perhaps we can change the framework by admitting that we have a very selective population of people making the Exercises as Jesuit novices. This would seem to be a sample biased toward those with vocations to the Society. Of course, this is heavily contingent on the accuracy of the screening process before people enter the Society. Our question then becomes, What is the baseline for those entering the Society who actually finish training and are ordained priests? Let us say the rate is one out of four. The probabilities are still weighted three to one against Jack's vocation to the Jesuit priesthood.

Given all this, we are left with trying to determine whether Jack has a vocation. Even though the odds are against him, what are signs that he is one of the few who really does have this vocation? This becomes, perhaps, an empirical question. Are feelings of consolation and desolation the best criteria, or are there other, more useful empirical criteria? Certainly, one might want to consider elements like belief in God's will, the fact that a person might have a vocation but choose not to follow it, and that changes in an individual's calling can occur with the passage of time and normal human development. Recall Ignatius's own preference for the use of external criteria when faced with decisions (Toner 1982). While

Ignatius did not speak of base rates, statistical decision rules, and empirically derived and validated selection criteria, perhaps these products of contemporary social science might be useful "external criteria" for today's discerners and directors to use.

Once people decide on an option, the *anchoring heuristic* leads them to focus on reasons substantiating the validity of their choice and to disregard evidence of its invalidity (Tversky and Kahneman 1974). The research suggests that initial positions taken often continue to influence subsequent judgments, even when the evidence on which they were originally based has been totally discredited (Williams et al. 1988).

Perhaps the Exercises and their rules for discernment help free the person from these "anchors." Yet again, recall that the Exercises routinely occur in a highly religious context and involve people with strong religious dispositions. Likewise, when making the Exercises we continually speak in "God talk," a language cognitively and affectively charged for religious people. Does this situation facilitate decision takers' becoming unduly anchored on a given choice or judgment? It seems to me that directors would do well to be alert to anchoring effects, and help discerners heed evidence that their initial choices and judgments may be inaccurate and/or invalid.

Biases and Other Influences Affecting Judgment

In addition to the important role heuristics play in decision making, research has identified several common biases and other factors which affect this process. These include the confirmation bias, the belief-bias effect, entrapment, and overconfidence.

The *confirmation bias,* also known as the "positive-test strategy," involves searching only for positive evidence. Research has clearly demonstrated that people show a persistent bias that favors gathering information which confirms their beliefs, decisions, and conclusions, rather than challenging or refuting them (Baron 1989; Williams et al. 1988). Not limiting themselves to abstract problems, these biases extend to judgments about other people and to decisions on important matters (Janis and Mann 1977; Williams et al. 1988). Research findings suggest that, once established, these biases are very difficult to change.

"Don't bother me with the facts; my mind is already made up" captures the essence of the *belief-bias effect,* also called "belief perseverance." The evidence suggests that this bias is stronger than the confirmation bias. People tend to cling to beliefs and conclusions they have reached even when these are strongly refuted by further evidence (Baron 1989). Various studies suggest that too much reliance on preexisting beliefs can impair our ability to think clearly and make valid judgments (Crooks and Stein 1988).

Entrapment, or "escalation of commitment," refers to the tendency to stick to prior decisions and attempt to justify them rather than having to admit mistakes and incur losses. The more one follows this course, the more one invests in the original decision and feels entrapped by it. Entrapment occurs in a wide variety of settings, ranging from foreign-policy decisions, through important business decisions, to interpersonal and personal decisions. On all these levels we find it difficult to admit our mistakes, "cut our losses," and re-evaluate our original positions (Baron 1989).

Overconfidence is the tendency to overestimate one's ability to make accurate judgments and decisions. In keeping with the availability heuristic, we generally find it easier to remember successful decisions or judgments than unsuccessful ones. As a result, we tend to overestimate our success at such tasks (Baron 1989). The confirmation bias also contributes to overconfidence as, once we have arrived at a decision, we tend to selectively rehearse reasons why the decision was a good one, and often completely neglect possible reasons the decision might be wrong (Williams et al. 1988).

The confirmation bias and overconfidence can also interact to close our minds to new attributions in our explanations of what happens in the world. When we hold prior beliefs that provide us with a plausible causal explanation for why an event may have occurred, the resulting bias prevents us from considering other plausible explanations. For example, in religiously disposed individuals attributions about "God's will" or "the work of the Spirit" can inhibit one from considering other explanations as to why an event happened or a choice was made.

All of these biases and other influences can enter into and interfere with discernment and decision making in a religious context. What does it mean when one "prays over" a decision, especially if framed as follows: "Well, I am leaning toward Option *A*, but I will pray over it and then make a decision to go with *A* or *B* or *C*"? What is involved in praying over this decision, and how will this either facilitate or negate confirmatory biases, or the belief-bias effect, and so forth? Once religiously inclined individuals believe that God is calling them to a given decision, they will experience a strong tendency either not to look for or to ignore data suggesting that this is not at all the best decision for them. To facilitate good decision making, directors need to help discerners pay attention to evidence that refutes their preferred decisions and/or prior beliefs.

While these heuristics and biases can be detrimental to good decision making, fortunately the research data indicate that such tendencies can be overcome. The model of decision making developed by Janis and his colleagues effectively neutralizes such biases and promotes sound decision making (Janis 1983 1989; Janis and Mann 1977; Wheeler and Janis 1980).

CONCLUSION

Discernment and decision making demand a balanced perspective. Put simply, it is all right to trust our feelings as long as we use our heads. It is helpful to remember that cognition and emotion (*a*) are highly interdependent and interactive, (*b*) have both positive and negative influences upon one another, and (*c*) have similar influences upon the decision-making process itself. We make mistakes when we (*a*) see emotions as separate from cognition, (*b*) consider that emotions are "better" criteria for discernment and decision, and, finally, (*c*) overlook the potentially distorting influence on one another of emotions and cognitions.

As discerners and/or directors, we do well to remember that our religious dispositions or cognitive sets, combined with the religious settings within which we live and work, create expectations which easily facilitate mistaken attributions and other cognitive errors. Our religious strengths might also function as weaknesses leading us to incorrectly attribute to the Spirit or to God's will things better explained in other ways. We need to be alert to these possibilities and employ strategies to counter any tendencies which can render our decision making defective.

A long-recognized fallacy in human reasoning is the tendency to overvalue individual-case evidence (Jack's or Jill's particular case or situation) and undervalue statistical information (Stanovich 1989). We humans like to rely more on our intuition than on rational or statistical decision methods. As a result, spiritual directors and/or decision counselors need to focus on the person's decision-making **processes** or **procedures**, rather than falling into the trap of paying most attention to the **content** of what the person is choosing. In this context, we assist others better by concentrating more on the **how** than on the **what.**

In our directing and counseling, we can supplement the Ignatian rules for discernment by using the conflict-theory model of Janis and his colleagues or some other structured approach to decision making. Whatever we use, we help others by conveying norms for information processing and for avoiding impulsive, defensive, or other poor-quality decisions.

Directors and counselors can help people facing important decisions to (*a*) clarify their objectives and establish useful criteria for the decision, (*b*) carry out a more effective information search, all the while realizing that their own feelings also constitute important pieces of information, (*c*) engage in thorough cognitive appraisals of their options, (*d*) be aware of faulty heuristics in their thinking, (*e*) correct some of their biased judgments and beliefs, and, finally, (*f*) pay more attention to the consequences of inadequate decisions they might be tempted to make.

I hope that this essay has presented information drawn from contemporary psychological theory and research that contributes to and complements what Ignatius and his commentators have said about discernment and making choices. This represents only a sampling of what is available from ongoing developments in this science. Perhaps these and other contributions from psychology can help us think critically about Ignatian spirituality and how we apply it in our lives and in our ministry with others. But that is a decision you will have to make, or discern—or whatever!

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SOURCES

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As part of our celebration of the anniversaries of the Society (1540–1990) and of St. Ignatius (1491–1991), Studies *continues to publish brief excerpts from writings of early Jesuits or about the early years of the Society. In this issue of Studies, dated September 1990, exactly 450 years since the approval of the Society, it is appropriate to include a brief account of the steps taken from the deliberations of 1539 and its "Five Chapters" to the working out of the first draft of the Constitutions.*

The title above for this item in Sources *is a free translation of a Spanish phrase, "El modo de ordenarse la Compañía," written by Saint Ignatius on the manuscript of the document known as the Deliberation of the First Fathers.* (Studies *published the full text of that document in its June 1974 [vol. 6, no. 4] issue in a new translation under the title "The Deliberation That Started the Jesuits," together with a historical introduction and a commentary by Jules J. Toner, S.J. Copies of that issue are still available for those who may wish to purchase them).*

The account here, slightly adapted from the version originally presented in Ignis: Essays in Spirituality by Jesuits in India, *vol. 4 (1987), follows the steps in the process as set out in* Ignace de Loyola fonde la Compagnie de Jesus *by André Ravier, S.J., published in English as* Ignatius of Loyola and the Founding of the Society of Jesus *(Ignatius Press, 1987).*

First Stage (1537–41): The first companions work together

During the sessions of May 4, 25, and June 11, 1539, they discussed and decided on a number of points which they termed *Determinationes Societatis,* concerning, for example, obedience the pope, to the superior of the Society, missions, admissions of new recruits, their formation, teaching of Christian doctrine, and so forth.

Still in June 1539, the companions in Rome composed the "Quinque capitula" or "Summa Instituti," the basic document for the Formula of the Institute finally approved by Paul III in *Regimini militantis Ecclesiae,* dated September 27, 1540, which incorporated almost entirely the Five Chapters. There was an important change, however. The latter envisages fixed revenues in the Society to support those in training. The Formula in *Regimini militantis Ecclesiae* envisages the foundation of colleges for this purpose, and it is the colleges, not the Society, that have the right to fixed revenues. The idea of the colleges is attributed to Laínez.

Another document of this time, a little later, actually, which reflects hesitations and searching in regard to poverty is the "Fundación de casa" (founding of a house); it accepts revenues for the sacristy (the reason is that Codaccio, a priest who had recently joined the Society, had obtained permission to transfer to the Society the Church of Santa Maria della Strada, a parish with revenues attached). Later on, Ignatius will come back to this in his deliberation, and eventually it will be changed to the original decision not to have any revenues.

In March 1541 the first companions who can do so congregate in Rome for the election of the general. Those present were Ignatius, Laínez, Salmerón, Jay, Broët, and Codure. Absent were Rodrigues and Xavier in Portugal, Favre in Germany, and Bobadilla in Naples.

During the meetings of 1540, the companions had delegated to those who would be in Rome the authority to write the constitutions. When they met in 1541 for the election of the general, they decided to settle some points before the election, still acting as "equals." The procedure adopted was that Ignatius and Codure would prepare the matter while the others engaged in the apostolate in Rome. When the matter was ready, they would all meet to consider it. In this document, which was eventually called *Constitutiones anni 1541,* we find important directives with regard, for example, to the election of the general, the habit, the scholastics, and admission to probation. Thus the work proceeded in an unfailing spirit of collaboration. At the end of those sessions, they went on to the election of Ignatius as the first general.

Second Stage (1541–47): Ignatius works alone

The Formula says that the general has the authority to make constitutions by a majority vote, with the advice of his companions. In 1541 the six present in Rome left that work to Ignatius and Codure with the vote of those in Rome or in Italy (by letter). But Codure died on August 29, 1541, and Ignatius was left to do the work alone, eventually with all the authority to write the constitutions by himself. But he tried in all possible ways to consult them and submit his writing for their approval.

This period appears to some as somewhat barren as far as the writing of the Constitutions is concerned. Even Nadal says that "Ignatius did not put his hand seriously to the writing of the Constitutions till 1546." In comparison to the preceding and the following periods, it does seem less active. And yet no small progress was made. In 1542 Ignatius obtained from Paul III permission for the general to send men on missions among the faithful. To send Jesuits among infidels still remained the prerogative of the pope.

The Spiritual Journal is evidence of the careful way Ignatius elected and prayed while doing work on the Constitutions. In 1544 it shows us Ignatius coming back to the whole question of poverty, about revenues for the sacristy. In the same journal an entry on March 17, 1544, remarks, "I begin to prepare myself for the first consideration of the question of missions."

He refers no doubt to the document "Constitutiones circa missiones," the basis for Part 7 of the Constitutions.

Other documents of this period contain the reflections of Ignatius on particular topics, for example, about the teaching of catechism; another one, "Contra omnem ambitionem" (about not accepting ecclesiastical dignities) was written, no doubt, because during the years 1543 to 1546 no fewer than six of the first companions (Rodrigues, Laínez, Bobadilla, Favre, Jay, and Broët) had been in danger of being entrusted with a bishopric. The brief *Exponi nobis* of June 5, 1546, instituted the grades of spiritual and temporal coadjutor, did away with the limitation on the number of professed, and established a subordinate structure of superiors (provincials, local superiors, etc.). There were also some "ordinances" for the scholastics of Padua, a declaration of some impediments to admission, and a text about benefactors.

An important document of this period shows the thoroughness with which Ignatius worked on the Constitutions. It is a list of about eighty-seven questions with regard to the institute. Codina has termed the whole document *Constituta et annotata*. In reality it is made of three distinct documents. "Determinationes antiquae" of 1547 (or possibly 1546), "Determinationes in Domino" of 1548, and "Notas para determinar" of 1548 or 1549. A number of pages are written in Ignatius's own handwriting, and there are traces of his writing in many others. Many of the answers to these questions are eventually incorporated into the Constitutions. It is not clear who posed these questions, when, and for what purpose. Aldama thinks that they are the jottings of Ignatius himself as he went on reflecting on different topics. It is perhaps the most significant document of this period, prior to the coming of Polanco. To this period also belongs a first draft of what will become the Examen.

Third Stage (1547–50): Ignatius and Polanco work together

The first thing that Polanco did was to organize the material which Ignatius had already collected. That is the matter Polanco put together in his four "Dubiorum series," dated 1547-48. In the first series he went through existing documents like "Constitutiones circa missiones" and "Determinationes antiquae," made an inventory of topics, noted his own questions, and sometimes noted down Ignatius's answers. In the second series he went through existing legislation of other orders, noting possible applications to the

Society and also some responses of Ignatius. The third series is a study of the papal documents regarding the Society, Polanco's reaction, and Ignatius's responses. The fourth is a kind of careful and systematic summary of the preceding three.

Along with this work Polanco prepared an even more important document, the "Industriae" (aids, resources), which he himself explains as being "aids which the Society ought to use to better advance towards its goal." We find in it already the whole matter of the Constitutions in some kind of plan and order. The twelve *industriae* will turn into the ten parts of the Constitutions. Historians agree that it is the joint work of Ignatius and Polanco, some giving more importance to the writing of Polanco, others to the inspiration of Ignatius.

Finally, during this period Polanco also worked in the preparation of the draft of the Formula to be included in the bull *Exposcit debitum* of Julius III, published on June 21, 1550.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The two letters here presented are part of a series of such letters occasioned by the publication of the March 1990 issue of Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits, *"Jesuit Spirituality from a Process Perspective," whose author was Joseph A. Bracken, S.J. In May 1990* Studies *published a letter from Avery Dulles, S.J., commenting on some problems raised by the original article, and Joseph Bracken responded in the same issue. Now Paul V. Mankowski, S.J., has made some remarks on that response, and Joseph Bracken has in turn replied once again.* Studies *is happy to publish both of these thoughtful letters; with them concludes the published exchange of views on the original article. We hope that other articles will in the future also occasion such responses.*

John W. Padberg, S.J.

Editor:

On pages 38–41 of the May 1990 issue of *Studies,* Fr. Joseph Bracken responded to some of the questions posed by Fr. Avery Dulles concerning the doctrine of God entailed by Bracken's process approach to spirituality. For one reader, the response raised more problems than it solved.

The basis of Dulles's critique is that Bracken's doctrine cannot be reconciled with conciliar teaching. While hinting that the process approach also runs afoul of orthodox soteriology and eschatology, Dulles restricts himself to six major problems of trinitarian theology wherein he finds a difference between the authoritative teaching of the Church and the view stated or implied in Bracken's proposal. In his reply, Bracken does not contest any of the divergences noted by Dulles in respect to their obvious "surface level" disparity; rather, he argues that this apparent divergence is largely illusory. Once allowance has been made for the philosophical presuppositions (Stoic, Neoplatonic, Aristotelian) which undergird the conciliar expressions of faith, once the world view has been adjusted in accordance with that of process thought, it will be clear, Bracken says, that his doctrine is that of the Church. Of his own systematic theology, Bracken writes, "I was careful to adjust the philosophical presuppositions of Whitehead's thought to the truths of the faith and not vice versa" (p. 39).

Now this is an entirely honorable statement of purpose, and I do not for a moment impugn Bracken's good faith in the matter. But what can it mean? The problem is, How does Bracken have access to the "truths of the faith" such that he (and we) can determine whether or not he has successfully adjusted Whitehead's thought to them? Where are these truths expressed? To say "in Scripture and in conciliar documents" is to pose a dilemma in which Bracken can find no help. For if the "truths of the faith" have been expressed in a publicly accessible way, either (1) the truth consists in what some agreed-upon authorities **meant** when they enunciated certain statements (which is not to say that such meaning is easily discoverable) or (2) the truth consists not in what their enunciators meant but in something deeper which we can recover by an agreed-upon heuristic method. Now the first alternative, which Bracken would call the conditioned understanding, he explicitly denies to be the case (p. 39). Yet he cannot appeal to the second because what is at issue is precisely the authoritative basis of his method—here, process thought. The *demonstrandum* of his argument cannot also be a premise.

But there remains, in fact, the third possibility that the "truths of the faith" in Bracken's understanding are not to be connected with **meaning** at all, but are simply concatenations of words, consecrated phonemes to which no perduring semantic value can be attached. Of the classical underpinnings of conciliar formulations, he writes:

> These philosophical presuppositions do not thereby render the *faith statement* false, but they condition what the reader understands by certain key words, such as the unity of the divine being, its simplicity, immutability, etc. Given another world view such as I have proposed in my writings, *the words remain but their meaning is inevitably somewhat altered.* (p. 39; emphasis added)

Unless I am seriously misreading this argument, I take it that for Bracken it is the bare "faith statement" which is to be preserved intact, while the meanings attributed to such statements by the council fathers are ultimately dispensable. I am not imputing a naive chronological relativism to Bracken; rather, he seems to be proposing a kind of lexical positivism. "The words remain," but in such a manner that their meaning is changed. The qualifier "somewhat" is not reassuring. For Bracken, the original understanding is conditioned in such a way that he feels himself at liberty to alter it. But how far? And in what respects? And with what **authority?**

In rough terms, Dulles appears to be saying to Bracken, "Your God seems other than what the Fathers of, say, Vatican I understood when they insisted He was immutable." To which Bracken replies, "Ah, but they said 'God is immutable' based on an Aristotelian metaphysic. In the Brackenian metaphysic, I too can say 'God is immutable,' but the **meaning** of the key word 'immutable' has been altered. In my view, I've kept the Faith if I've kept the phrase." But do we maintain that anyone who can utter the words "God is immutable" is ipso facto orthodox on that point? If I could show that there was an Arian or a Starhawkian understanding of immutability in virtue of which each could make the same "faith statement," would I thus acquit them of heresy? Alternatively, if Bracken should admit that someone can indeed claim "God is immutable" and yet have a heterodox understanding of immutability, what grounds could he have for saying this? To what court can he appeal which he has not already ruled out *ex hypothesi?* I do not intend to discuss whether or not Bracken himself has remained within the bounds of orthodoxy; suffice it to say that if a writer of Dulles's theological acumen suspects he "may be proposing a new faith rather than simply a new theology," there is reason to think such issues are not trivial.

The lexical positivism which I have attributed to Bracken is grounds for concern not simply about process thought but about contemporary theology generally. The tactic of maintaining traditional theological terms while attaching highly untraditional meanings to them is a risky business. At best it has the result of diminishing, rather than enlarging, precision of thought; at worst it can seem to be a form of chicanery. Neither increases esteem for the enterprise of theology. A particularly distressing example is found in Karl Rahner's 1978 essay "Ignatius of Loyola Speaks to a Modern Jesuit," published in *Ignatius of Loyola,* (ed. Imhof [London: Collins, 1979], in which he adopts the persona of St. Ignatius in order to discuss issues of topical concern. Speaking of Jesuit obedience, Rahner says:

> You must remain loyal to the papacy in theology (and in practice), because that is part of your heritage to a special degree, but because the actual form of the papacy remains subject, in the future too, to an historical process of change, your theology and ecclesiastical law has above all to serve the papacy as it will be in the future, so that it will be a help and not a hindrance to the unity of Christendom. (pp. 9–36)

Now it doesn't require a Bertrand Russell to see that the notion of loyalty to some yet-to-be-specified commitment makes no sense whatsoever. Such a "loyalty" would allow a Jesuit to say or do absolutely anything he wished, under the pretense of fidelity to the papacy—but, of course, to a **future** papacy, that of John (or Jeanne) XXIV, for example. Such a loyalty is utterly valueless, and no officeholder would trust the man who offered it to him. Rahner does not resolve a single murky notion into two clear ones; instead he infuses a kind of arbitrariness into a once-firm idea. The coinage of the language of fidelity is ever-so-slightly debased. There is an irony in the fact it is just this concept which Bracken proposes to Dulles in explanation of divine changelessness:

> [The three divine Persons'] fidelity and commitment to each other and their creatures is thus what is meant by immutability in this new, more strongly interpersonal My point is not to derogate the intentions of Frs. Rahner or Bracken, but to suggest that we cannot, like members of the Pickwick Club, simply evacuate words of their conventional meanings

and then pump them up again with the se-mantic values we find most expedient ad hoc. It is more than a ques-tion of "paradigm shift"; it is a question of whether, once semantics are divorced from lexicon, discourse about God will remain possible at all—or whether theology increasingly becomes, as in A. J. Ayer's taunt, "a science without a subject."

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Reply to the above letter:

Dear Paul,

When I returned to Cincinnati two weeks ago after a two-month absence, there was a pile of mail waiting for me, including your letter to me and communication with Fr. Padberg. Please excuse the delay in responding, but other tasks had to be accomplished first before I would have the leisure to ponder your remarks. I appreciate the graceful combination of humor and seriousness in your comments, and will try to do justice to them.

Your major point seems to be that I am guilty of verbal nominalism or linguistic positivism in preserving certain words out of the official documents of the Church but at the same time radically changing their meaning. This would appear to be an exercise in game playing after the fashion of Lewis Carroll in *Alice in Wonderland* and thus not worthy of a serious theologian. At the same time, I am sure that you know that in contemporary literary criticism the focus is much more on the text and what it says than on the intention of the author(s) in composing it. The reason for this shift of focus, as I understand it, is not simply because of the difficulty involved in recovering the intention of the author, but because of the conviction among most literary critics that a text always says more than its author explicitly has in mind. A text will inevitably reflect the worldview of its author, but it is not limited in its potential meaning to that same worldview. Someone else with a quite different worldview may read the text and find it quite meaningful in terms of his or her changed perspective. This second understanding is also part of the objective meaning of the text. (Paul Ricoeur's work *Interpretation Theory*, especially Chapter 2, "Speaking and Writing," makes this point quite well, in my judgment.)

The charm of the great literary classics, such as Shakespeare's tragedies, and, for that matter, the enduring value of the Hebrew and Christian Bibles are based on this ability of the text to speak meaningfully to human beings living in an entirely different cultural context than the authors of the text. In fairness, of course, one cannot simply ignore the intention of the author. For, as Ricoeur comments in the work cited above, this would result in the absolutizing of the text and/or the total relativizing of its meaning. The intention of the author is part of the objective meaning of the text, but only part of it, not the totality of its meaning. Accordingly, as Gadamer points out in *Truth and Method*, reading of a text always results in a "merger of horizons" (*Verschmelzung der Horizonte*), where the different worldviews of the author and the reader have to be somehow reconciled with one another. I myself would add that in the absence of the original author it is the responsibility of the community to preserve the received meaning of the text against the sometimes-capricious interpretations of individuals within the community. But, as I pointed out in Chapter 6 of my book *The Triune Symbol*, unless there is this healthy tension between exponents of the received interpretation of the text in question and its would-be novel interpreters, the text tends paradoxically to lose its relevance for the life of the community. It becomes a "dead letter" because its meaning is no longer subject to further question and debate.

In brief, then, I feel that I am doing a service to the Church by reopening the "God" question. As I see it, theological inquiry immediately after Vatican II focused on the nature of the Church; some years later, it shifted to the question of the uniqueness of Christ. But the most important issue is still ahead of us, namely, the deeper reality of God. It is this issue which I am seeking to address with my neo-Whiteheadian understanding of Christian dogma and, most recently, with my studies in the notion of Ultimate Reality among the religions of Asia (Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism). But, just for that reason, I feel a real need to stay close to the text of Scripture and to major conciliar statements on the nature of God. There will not be a "merger of horizons" unless through these texts I stay in vital contact with the received tradition of the Church. In any event, to return to my opening statement of this paragraph, I feel that I am doing a service to the Church by reopening the question of "God" within a faith context (as opposed to one of total disbelief or practical atheism). What is at stake here, as Sallie McFague points out in her book *Models of God,* Chapter 2, "Metaphorical Theology," is not simply belief in God but an understanding of God that is genuinely relevant to people of our generation. Inevitably, there will be some "miscarriages" in the gestation process. But it is important that we keep working at this task lest actual belief in God become a "dead letter" because so few people regard it as worthy of their attention any more.

To respond, then, to your objections more systematically, I would say that perhaps I am proposing a new faith instead of just a new theology if by that phrase is meant a new understanding of the faith enshrined in the text of Scripture and the major conciliar documents of the Church. But, as I see it, this is the only way that the faith can remain alive and develop. New theologies which do little more than restate an older understanding of the faith eventually do a disservice to the Church, since they increasingly present the faith in a way which no longer has appeal to the popular imagination. People may still give nominal adherence to the articles of faith as remembered from childhood, but all too often the faith as a whole is no longer the operative context in which they live their lives and make concrete decisions. Admittedly, differences of temperament play a role here. Some people fear any change in their basic religious beliefs; others, like myself, welcome the challenge to think through and reevaluate the truths of the faith. But in the end the faith will prosper or decline, depending upon how it is received by the Christian community.

You also asked by what authority I can legitimate my new understanding of the faith. I would say that my only authority is that of a believer asking his fellow believers what their faith in God really means. In the process, I set forth my own revised understanding of various doctrines about God. But it is up to the other Christians to decide how much of what I say makes sense to them. Church authorities can and should play a role here in reminding everyone of the received tradition of the Church on the matter. But, in the end, they, too, will find themselves submitting to the *sensus fidelium,* that felt understanding of what is true or false, right or wrong, about contemporary Church belief and practice. In a word, it is in the *sensus fidelium* that the Holy Spirit, in my view, is most effectively at work in the Church. This is not to deny a special providence for the pope and the bishops in the exercise of their teaching office. But their infallibility in matters of faith and morals is ultimately derived from the infallibility of the Church as a whole, which, as I see it, is best reflected in the *sensus fidelium.*

More could be said, but perhaps I should end here with my thanks for your careful reading of my work even though you chose to disagree with some of the points I made. At least between the two of us, the doctrine of God will never become a "dead letter."

Fraternally yours,

Joseph Bracken, S.J.
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